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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement* submitted by Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 November 2001]

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*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

Report on unemployment in Argentina

Mental Health Commission of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (Asamblea Permanente para los Derechos Humanos – APDH)

The Mental Health Commission of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights has chosen to concentrate its efforts on the unemployment problem, since we consider the right to work to be the right most violated in the last decade in our country.

The government's statistics on unemployment are inexact. It is evident that they portray an unemployment rate inferior to the authentic rate if we remember that they do not include the "discouraged," who haven't been looking for work in the last month, those who work an hour a week, and rural workers.

In a country where the social gap (between rich and poor) has increased parallel to the unemployment rate (see graph) and in which unemployment is six times greater among the poor than among the rich, not to have work implies and threatens with the dreaded danger of starting down the road towards marginalization. Once fallen, returning is extremely difficult.

POPULATION AFFECTED	POVERTY LEVEL	INDIGENCE LEVEL
MAY 2000	29.7%	7.5%
MAY 2001	32.7%	10.3%

Already in 1986, the World Health Organization described unemployment as one of the main "epidemiological catastrophes" of contemporary society. We believe that it is planned violence that is exerted over society.

Social violence

In Argentina, with a tradition of social rights linked almost exclusively to the condition of being employed, where unemployment insurance is of scarce coverage and economic impact, the picture is completely different from Europe's. Instead of rights and public policies being foremost, the market appears as the only possible scenario where the situation plays itself out. This favors a social disciplinary process clearly perceived by the unemployed faced with the search for work. Unemployment becomes used as a method of social control.

This context is aggravated by the parallel violation of the social security rights of pensioners, who have also been the adjustment variable for the state's economy in the last decade and on whom the need to support their unemployed children falls, despite their own scarce resources.

This new socioeconomic model, which requires maximum security for financial and monetary capital, degrades human capital, relegating people to infrahuman conditions.

Restricted in his/her individual prerogative, an unemployed person feels obliged to accept any type of working conditions.

Working conditions have also been degraded by the so-called "Law of Labor Flexibilization." This so-called flexibilization also affects those who have work. Knowing that the labor supply amply exceeds the markets' demands for labor, those who are working today live in a continuous state of anxiety as to whether they'll be employed tomorrow. They will then also accept the violation of their labor rights to extremes unheard of in decades passed.

If early in the last century the eight-hour work day was a valued social conquest, today many working people conform to overemployment, even under unfavorable conditions: several jobs to reach the same income reached previously with one, non-remunerated overtime, etc.

In this social context unemployment becomes a structural and massive threat to society. However. it is portrayed and perceived as an individual phenomenon, which increases the feeling of powerlessness and lack of protection. The violence of being excluded from the labor market gets intensified in the form of traumatic anxiety: Since it is not perceived in its social origin, the individual reproaches him/herself, blames him/herself, retreats into automarginalization, becomes socially isolated. And society blames the unemployed as individually responsible.

A secondary victimization phenomenon is thus produced: The social disqualification and the disassociation from the previous in-group network that the person suffers greatly increase demands on family ties. Families can not provide enough support for the anxiety and loss of self-esteem suffered by the unemployed.

With parents who have lost their career perspectives or are threatened by this possibility and with grandparents who are excluded from a minimum of social security (deficient or non-existent pension provisions), young people who aren't able to achieve a first job see their possibilities for planning a future seriously threatened. They lose hope for the future and value the present, today, which favors escapism towards drugs and alcohol.

The violence exercised by this pattern of exclusion implodes among the excluded far more than they impact on the rest of society:

Although the rate of homicides is repeatedly represented as greater, it isn't increasing nearly as rapidly as that of suicides. Among people in the 45 to 60 age group, the increase in suicides and domestic violence parallels unemployment increase: three times more suicides than homicides, with a 20% increase from 1999 to 2000.

The statistics on young people's addictions in Buenos Aires (Capital) and Greater Buenos Aires evolve parallel to those of youth's unemployment.

- Young people (14-18 years old) who neither work nor study: 45%

- Young people (19-25 years old) with addiction problems: 38.9%

Proposals

On the national level:

A. Unemployment Insurance that covers the minimum needs of a family

B. Pensions that cover basic needs. Independence of pension payments from conditioning by either domestic or international State obligations.

C. Considering that effective social policies are those that act preventively on areas of vulnerability or precariousness, to avoid people's "falling out of the social network," the concentration of state and NGO's efforts on highest risk groups: pregnant women and infants, young people, and seniors citizens.